



EMPOWERING WOMEN, EXPANDING AWARENESS AND ERADICATING VIOLENCE

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ABSTRACT

Critics of the Indian family system say that women in the Indian society have from time immemorial been victims of intolerance. They haven't enjoyed an equal platform with their male counterparts. They have not only been denied at the society level but also in the family. She may not even have any share in her father's property. Ideologies, institutional practices and existing norms in society have contributed much to their harassment. In spite of the legislative measures adopted in favor of women in our society after independence, the spread of education and women's gradual economic independence, countless women still continue to be discriminated and harassed. It is not uncommon to come across individuals from all strata of society, not expressing happiness at the birth of a girl child. In fact there are sections of societies in India that even kill the girl child before she could come into this world. Illiteracy, cultural and religious oppressions have made their condition even more pathetic. Nehru, the first Prime Minister of Independent India, clearly said that while women participation in the nationalist rise was crucial, "the women of India have an additional task, and that is to free themselves from the dictatorship of manmade customs and laws. They will have to carry on this second struggle by themselves for man is not likely to help them.

It is assumed that awareness building about women's right and a comparative study on the level of awareness about constitutional and legal rights and opportunities will lead to eradicate violence against women necessary for their empowerment. This may be taken as a step towards gender equality. In this study, an attempt is made to throw light on the awareness level of women regarding their constitutional and legal rights.

INTRODUCTION

"Women's empowerment and human development go hand in hand".

Dr. A. P. J. Kalam said that empowerment of women is essential as their value systems lead to the development of a good family, good society and ultimately a good nation. Therefore various women empowerment programmes have been launched for the purpose of nation building activity. Jawaharlal Nehru once said "you can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women". The socioeconomic status of women in society can be taken as the yardstick for measuring the level of progress and development of a nation. The empowerment, equality and autonomy of women are globally recognized as a key factor for all round growth and development of a society. In the story of a developmental process; women's empowerment occupies topmost priority. In most of the developing countries various strategies have been made for empowering women which includes economic empowerment, political empowerment, social empowerment and more particularly gender equality in order to eliminate all types of discrimination against women. Women empowerment has become a challenge of 21st century. In India also various constitutional and legal provisions have been guaranteed for enhancing the status of women. Efforts have been provided through various suitable socio economic welfare programmes for women. Despite of these efforts, Indian society fails to achieve the goals of equality, social justice and protection of women. Gender discrimination, high infant mortality rate and maternal mortality rate, crime against women, child labors etc. have become major challenges facing by the Indian society at present. Therefore, it is necessary to make women aware of their rights and empower them to raise their voices against any kind of exploitation at anywhere. It is assumed that awareness building about women's right and opportunities will lead to eliminate violence against women necessary for their empowerment. This may be taken as a step towards gender equality. In other words it may be considered as a measuring tool of women's empowerment through the level of awareness. Amongst these, increase in communication, knowledge and wakefulness levels on issues affecting the community at large and women in particular such as women's health, nutrition, reproductive rights, legal rights, literacy etc. have been considered as essential indicators. Any plan and programmes meant for empowering women proceed from knowledge and awareness which ultimately results into capacity building and skill development necessary to strengthen the women folk at large. Awareness building about women's situation, discrimination, rights and opportunities may be considered essential towards eradication of violence against women which is the dire need of today to bring gender equality in our society.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To find out the awareness level of women about their constitutional and legal rights.
2. To highlight the importance of awareness for capacity building and skill development necessary for their empowerment.
3. To understand the correlation between education and awareness building.
4. To study the concept of empowerment and its various dimensions among dif-

ferent communities.

5. To study the Status and process of Empowerment among the tribal and non-tribal women.
6. To bring to light the reality and causes of the existing social inequality between men and women with a view to compare the structure of both the tribal and non-tribal societies of the states.
7. To understand women-men equal participation in developmental processes in country.
8. To analyze women's movements to fight for their rightful contribution in the society.
9. To analyze the status and role of men and the influence of patriarchal values
10. To find out if the process of empowerment is strong among the women.

METHODOLOGY

A sample consisting of 100 working and non-working women belonging to schedule caste, schedule tribe, OBC and general castes in the age group of 30-55 years. Simple random sampling method was applied for that. The sample was divided into two groups of 50 each belonging to working and non-working women. Again these groups were divided into two groups of 25 each belonging to highly educated women of high economic status, educated women belonging to middle class and less educated women belonging to lower economic status. An attempt is made to collect data from primary source as well as secondary sources. In order to collect primary data, observation, questionnaire and interview schedules were used.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Women's empowerment is a crucial issue in our nation. Today as they themselves have become better aware of the need and as they struggle to reiterate their original identity, rights, values and dignity as human beings and have become determined to stand against the threat to their existence committed by ideologies of sexism, colonialism, materialism and individualism. Thus, for the women, the struggle for gender equality is to be commenced not only within the confines of the home and the community but also at the state and national arenas and platforms where negotiations for socio-economic cooperation and understandings are accomplished. Women have no contribution as they have no control over their lives and natural resources. Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation, clearly points out, "If an ancestral treasure lying buried in a corner of the house unknown to the members of the family were suddenly discovered what a celebration it would be for the occasion." Rural women's marvelous power is lying dormant. If the women of rural wake up they will dazzle the Nation.

CONCLUSION

Women empowerment can be viewed as a variety of several interrelated and mutually reinforcing components among which awareness building is a basic

one. Education is mainly responsible for making the women folk aware of their rights and opportunities. Educated women can distinguish the importance of these facilities and know how to seek it for themselves. In order to promote gender equality, education can be used as one of the important means of empowering women. For proper propagation of knowledge and information of women's right both education and media should be used effectively. Furthermore legislations alone cannot improve the status of women unless the women themselves grow conscious of their pride and needs. It is necessary to motivate women so that they can raise their voices against any kind of exploitation. Education as well as media should offer help to all people to raise the slogan, which should be the slogan of 21st century "Empowering women, Expanding awareness and Eradicating violence".

IMPLICATION AND SUGGESTION

Already various plans and programmes have been launched for improving socio-economic status of women in our country. But all of these are found to be confined to the statute books. Proper implementation of these programmes in the practical field is really very urgent at present. In order to implicate the policies, policy and programme frames, implementation and development agencies, law enforcement machinery and the judiciary as well as non-governmental organization should come forward to shoulder their responsibility. There must be a close link among Govt., NGO's, and general public as well as other organization to make all these programmes fruitful.

Following measures need to be undertaken to implement already existing policies:

- A. Removal of all references derogatory to the dignity of women from all public documents and legal instruments.
- B. Review of curriculum and educational materials to include gender education and human rights issues.
- C. Promoting social awareness on gender issues and women's human rights.
- D. Use of different forms of mass media to communicate social messages relating to women's equality and empowerment.

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